

VZCZCXRO7993
OO RUEHTRO
DE RUCNDT #0164/01 0511313

ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 201313Z FEB 09
FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5900
INFO RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA IMMEDIATE 0599
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM IMMEDIATE 1383
RUEHLGB/AMEMBASSY KIGALI IMMEDIATE 0314
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [CG](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: USG HOLMES BRIEFS ON
HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, briefed the Security Council on the current humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on February 17 following his visit to the country. He described a new dynamic created by recent cooperation between the DRC and Rwanda in combating the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda (FDLR) in the Kivus and between the DRC, Uganda and Southern Sudan against the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in Orientale Province. He said that the joint military operations against these two armed groups may lead to improvements in the humanitarian situation, but also carry great risk to civilians caught in the crossfire. Holmes pointed out that an end to active fighting between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) has allowed tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home, but many more remain displaced due to memories of CNDP violence and continued presence of CNDP administrative structures. Holmes stated that sexual violence remains a huge problem in the DRC, but that the UN has a system-wide strategy to address this issue. Ambassador Rice welcomed regional cooperation to return stability to eastern DRC and underscored the importance of taking necessary measures to protect civilians. Other Council members echoed these points. The Council President spoke to the press following the meeting on behalf of the Council condemning the violence against civilians and calling for respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) USG Holmes briefed the Council on his February 6-10 trip to the DRC to survey the humanitarian situation. Holmes had previously visited the DRC in September 2007. He remarked that political and military initiatives have created a new dynamic which could have a positive impact on the humanitarian situation. The mediation led by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, President Obasanjo and President Mpaka from the African Union has improved dialogue and cooperation between the DRC and Rwanda. Holmes believes the joint military operations between the DRC and Rwanda against the FDLR and between the DRC, Uganda and Southern Sudan against the LRA have the potential to improve stability in eastern DRC. He confirmed, however, the new military operations also carry great risk of triggering increased violence against civilians as already witnessed in Orientale Province when the LRA carried out massacres against civilians

in December.

¶3. (SBU) Holmes said that the fighting between the CNDP and FARDC in North Kivu created a further 250,000 IDPs since August 2008 on top of the existing caseload of 800,000. The decision of the CNDP to integrate into the FARDC has reduced the level of conflict in the area and allowed tens of thousands of IDPs to return home. However, memories of CNDP violence and the fact that CNDP administrative structures remain in place in many villages prevent many IDPs from returning to their areas of origin. Holmes noted that these IDPs lost virtually everything during their displacement and will require a great deal of support from the international community if they are to return home in safety and dignity.

¶4. (SBU) Holmes said that sexual violence continues to plague eastern DRC. It remains a feature of everyday life. The lack of criminal prosecution of perpetrators and the fact that many alleged rapists remain in the senior ranks of the FARDC paints a bleak picture. The UN's senior advisor on sexual violence helped to develop a system-wide strategy to strengthen prevention, protection and response to sexual violence. Holmes urged the government of the DRC to make combating sexual violence a priority.

¶5. (SBU) Holmes informed the Council of the increasing number of Rwandan refugees choosing to repatriate during the past six weeks and the greater number of FDLR cadres joining MONUC's demobilization program. Together these developments may, he thought, signal an end to the chaos created by the FDLR in eastern Congo.

¶6. (SBU) Holmes said the LRA's violent attacks against civilians in Orientale Province are a consequence of the

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joint military operations against the LRA launched by DRC, Uganda and Southern Sudan. Aid agencies responded to the humanitarian needs triggered by LRA violence by expanding assistance into areas where populations had been targeted by the LRA. However, the delivery of aid to these populations has been hampered by the enormity of the area, the dispersal of civilians, the difficult terrain and the lack of adequate infrastructure. Holmes reminded the Council that it was urgent to remove the threat of the LRA from the region, and that MONUC should strengthen its presence in Orientale Province to protect civilians.

¶7. (SBU) Holmes emphasized that in attempting to carry out its mandate to protect civilians, MONUC faces the reality of limited resources spread out over a wide area. He lauded the creation of Joint Protection Teams to better understand the needs of civilians. He called upon the Council and Troop Contributing Countries to allow maximum flexibility in operating procedures and rules of engagement in terms of the protection mandate. He stated that MONUC has not received the urgently-needed additional troops recently authorized by the Council due to a slow response from member states.

¶8. (SBU) In closing, Holmes cited a need for the re-establishment of government authority at the local level as a prerequisite for any lasting improvements in the lives of the people of eastern DRC. The government of the DRC and the international community must work together to build governance capacity at the local level. Given the great humanitarian needs of the DRC in conflict-affected areas and beyond, the UN has appealed for \$831 million to fund relief and recovery programs.

COUNCIL MEMBERS RESPOND

¶9. (SBU) Ambassador Rice signaled support for improvements in the relationship between the DRC and Rwanda as well as the joint military operations between governments in the region to combat the FDLR and the LRA. She called for greater cooperation between the DRC and MONUC on these joint

operations due to their potential impact on civilians. She emphasized the USG's concern for humanitarian response in DRC and the importance of prioritizing the protection of civilians.

¶10. (SBU) Council members called for respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law in the DRC. All agreed that the protection of civilians was a top priority. They welcomed the joint military operations against the FDLR and LRA as a way to improve stability in eastern DRC. France called for MONUC to be given all tools necessary to fulfill its mandate to protect civilians and also spoke of the need to reform the judiciary system in the DRC in order to end the culture of impunity. Mexico called for full deployment of MONUC in order to protect civilians and carry out demobilization activities. Russia pressed for close cooperation between MONUC and the FARDC in order to lessen the impact on civilians caught in the crossfire.

¶11. (SBU) Council members authorized Japan, as presidency holder, to speak to the press for the Council and suggested several elements of press guidance: a) condemning the brutal attacks of the LRA and calling on the LRA to lay down its arms, b) condemning the FDLR attacks on civilians in North Kivu and calling on the FDLR to lay down its arms and join the demobilization process, c) welcoming the increase in the number of FDLR members and dependents seeking to return to Rwanda, d) calling on all parties to protect civilians, particularly women and children, and respect international humanitarian law and human rights law, and e) encouraging the governments of the region to coordinate with MONUC when planning joint military operations.

Rice